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ABSTRACT

In 1996, Texas's San Antonio College (SAC) participated in the American Association of Community Colleges' Exploring America's Communities project, which works to strengthen the teaching and learning of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. The college's plan to enhance teaching and learning about American pluralism and identity is to offer a new course beginning in Spring 1997 entitled "American Pluralism and Identity." This team-taught course will allow students to explore the sociology, historical development, and literary expression of the German-American, African-American, and Mexican-American communities. Goals that have been met include the following: (1) faculty have been selected; (2) a comprehensive syllabus has been written; (3) guest speakers have been recruited; (4) field trips have been arranged; (5) the new course has been approved and listed in the spring 1997 schedule; and (6) a colloquium on American pluralism has been created. The two primary areas where the program encountered difficulties were in recruiting students for courses and the unwillingness of faculty to change. Continuing student recruitment, final approval from the SAC Board of Trustees, and assuring articulation with the University of Texas still remain to be completed. Because the course has not yet been taught, student responses have not been compiled. (HAA)

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San Antonio College
Exploring America's Communities Progress Report

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In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book
(New Orleans, LA, January 18-19, 1997)

JC 970 119

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San Antonio College
1300 San Pedro Avenue • San Antonio, Texas 78212-4299 • (210) 733-2000 A College of the Alamo Community College District

PROGRESS REPORT

San Antonio College is an urban campus offering academic, occupational/technical,and continuing education courses. It serves a student population which is 50.5% Hispanic, 41.3% white, 4.3% black, and 3.8% other, a total of, 21,376 credit students and approximately 15,000 non-credit students. Established in 1925, San Antonio College is the largest single-campus community college in Texas and one of the largest in the United States. The college is a public community college which provides for and supports the educational and lifelong learning needs of a multi-cultural community. As a leader in education, San Antonio College is committed to excellence in helping students reach their full potential by developing their academic competencies, critical thinking skills, communication proficiency, civic responsibility and global awareness.

The college's plan to enhance teaching and learning about American pluralism and identity is to offer a new course

beginning in the Spring of 1997 entitled American Pluralism and Identity. This team-taught course will explore common American values as they are expressed in the following San Antonio/South Texas ethnic communities: German-American, African-American, and Mexican-American. Students will explore the sociology, the historical development,and the literary expression of American values. Field trips and guest speakers will be an integral part of the course's requirements. This course will reflect the college's mission of responding to the educational needs of a diverse population.

Thus far the following goals have been met:

1. Selected the faculty (Dawn Elmore-McCrary, English; Nora McMillan, History; Clyde Hudgins, Sociology);
2. Written a comprehensive syllabus that includes novels, sociological readings, historical documents and classroom activities that represent the three ethnic groups;
3. Recruited guest speakers David McDonald, director of the Navarro House Historical Site; Walter Schumann German Interpretive Guide;
4. Arranged field trips to San Antonio Public Library, New Braunfels historical district, and Institute of Texan Cultures;
5. Received approval for the new course from the coordinating board and the Academic Council of San Antonio College;

6. Listed the course in the Spring 1997 Schedule;

7. Created a colloquium on American pluralism and identity featuring speakers from a variety of ethnic groups to round out the ethnic diversity of the course.

We encountered difficulties in two primary areas: student recruitment and faculty inertia. Despite the fact that several methods of recruitment were utilized, including articles in the student newspaper, a notice in the faculty bulletin, memos to colleagues, and flyers posted throughout the campus, to date an insufficient number of students have enrolled in the course in order for it to make this Spring semester. Recruitment for the course in still ongoing.

While we have experienced great cooperation from the college administration, we have encountered some resistance at the faculty level which we interpret as being reluctance to change. Questions arose as to the proper designation of the course (humanities or interdisciplinary studies), which department would take responsibility for scheduling the course, and whether the course would transfer to upper-level institutions. While all of the problems have been resolved, each created political tensions which took time and effort which could have been devoted to the course development.

At this point continuing student recruitment, final approval of the San Antonio College Board of Trustees, and articulation with the University of Texas at San Antonio still remain to be

completed. We plan to complete all these tasks by the middle of the Spring semester.

Because the course has not yet been taught, we have been unable to compile student response; however, initial student response to the crucial questions about American pluralism and identity will be available for the conference in New Orleans, assuming we get sufficient enrollment.

The three faculty members who have been working on the project have spent much time focusing on questions of American pluralism and identity and have come to several conclusions. First, while there is clear evidence of strong commitment to the values of family, education, self-determination, community, work, and spirituality, among Americans, there is great diversity in the expression of these values among various ethnic groups. Next, we are divided by the inability to perceive that these values can be expressed in different ways in different communities. We have found that these questions to be more problematic and critical that was first imagined. It is hoped that we will be able to communicate the importance of these questions to the students and that we can all work together throughout the semester to reach some firm conclusions.